

Message Text

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51

ACTION AF-07

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 PA-01 PRS-01 RSC-01 /013 W

----- 037608

R 301405Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9919

INFO USIA WASHDC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE KINSHASA 9085

STATE FOR AF/C

USIA FOR IAA, IPS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SCUL

SUBJ: FOREMAN-ALI: THE FINAL ROUND?

1. WITH MORE THAN 60,000 ZAIRIANS ROARING THEIR APPROVAL AT EVERY PUNCH WHICH BROUGHT MUHAMMAD ALI THE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE IN HIS OCT30 MATCH WITH CHAMPION GEORGE FOREMAN, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE FIGHT WAS A COMPLETE SUCCESS IN LOCAL EYES. AND, FORTUNATELY, IT WAS AN EXCITING FIGHT, FOR THE LAST-MINUTE CHAOS LEFT ALL FOREIGN MEDIA -- PARTICULARLY THE HIGHLY VERBAL AMERICAN CONTINGENT -- PRIMED ONCE AGAIN TO ROAST ZAIRE AND ITS HIGHLY-TOUTED "SUPERFIGHT OF THE CENTURY".

2. THE REASON: A THOROUGHLY MISMANAGED DISTRIBUTION OF PRESS PASSES AND SEAT ASSIGNMENTS WHICH ERUPTED INTO A WILD SHOUTING MATCH IN WHICH EVEN CELEBRATED JOURNALISTS LIKE NORMAN MAILER, BUDD SCHULBERG AND GEORGE PLIMPTON HAD TO SCRAMBLE WITH EVERYONE ELSE FOR TICKETS. THE FOREIGN JOURNALISTS, NATURALLY, DID NOT UNDERSTAND THAT THE MANNER AND THE LAST-MINUTE TIMING OF DISTRIBUTION OF PRESS PASSES WERE TYPICALLY ZAIRIAN AND WOULD HAVE BEEN HANDLED IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SAME MANNER IF NO FOREIGNERS HAD BEEN INVOLVED. AS

IT TURNED OUT, SOME MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES FINALLY RECEIVED TICKETS AT MIDNIGHT OCTOBER 29, AFTER WAITING FOR MORE THAN FIVE HOURS.

3. EVEN WORSE, THERE WAS NEVER ANY EXPLANATION GIVEN FOR THE BOTCHED-UP DISTRIBUTION. ZAIRIAN AUTHORITIES PROBABLY THOUGHT NONE WAS NECESSARY. THERE WERE SOME REPORTS THAT HANK SCHWARTZ, VICE-PRESIDENT OF CO-PROMOTER VIDEO TECHNIQUES, FORCED HIS PR MEN TO SCRAP THEIR CAREFULLY WORKED OUT PLAN IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE A SCORE OF VIPS WHO ARRIVED AT THE LAST MINUTE. IF SO, THEN IT WAS ALL FOR NAUGHT, FOR THE 6,000 "RINGSIDE" \$250 TICKETS -- FOR THE PRESS AND WELL-TO-DO -- WERE LESS THAN ONE-THIRD OCCUPIED AT FIGHT TIME.

4. THE TICKET RUMBLE COULD HAVE BEEN THE FINAL STRAW FOR MOST OF THE AMERICAN MEDIA. AS IT WAS, THE REALITY THAT THERE WOULD INDEED -- AND FINALLY -- BE A FIGHT AND, THAT ONCE OVER, THEY WOULD BE ON THEIR WAY OUT OF ZAIRE WAS ENOUGH TO TIDE MOST OF THEM OVER.

5. STILL, SOME OF THE 300 OR SO JOURNALISTS HAD TO TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS. SPORTSWRITER RICK TALLEY OF THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, FOR EXAMPLE, ON FINDING HIMSELF RELEGATED TO A POOR FIFTH ROW SEAT, PROMPTLY RIPPED OFF THE ID STICKERS ON A SECOND ROW SEAT AND TELEPHONE ASSIGNED TO A REPORTER FROM EL TIEMPO OF ROME WHO WAS A FEW MINUTES LATE IN ARRIVING. THE ITALIAN JOURNALISTS EVENTUALLY FOUND A SEAT -- IN THE FIFTH ROW*

6. IF THE JOURNALISTS WERE LESS THAN IMPRESSED WITH ASPECTS OF THEIR VISIT, AT LEAST THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID FOR THE TOURISTS. THE EXPLANATION IS SIMPLE: THERE JUST WEREN'T ANY. THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ZAIRE'S KINSHASA CAMPUS HAD 500 BEDS SET ASIDE WHICH WERE NEVER USED. PRE-FIGHT TALK OF MORE THAN 100 BLACK AND WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS COMING FOR THEIR FIGHT ACTUALLY RESULTED IN LESS THAN A SCORE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS IN THE STADIUM. KINSHASA WAGS DELIGHTED IN BOASTING TO JOURNALISTS THAT THEY COULD INDEED PRODUCE GENUINE TOURISTS -- TWO OR THREE, PERHAPS -- FOR INTERVIEWS.

7. HERE AGAIN, THE DELAY IN THE FIGHT PROBABLY TURNED AWAY SOME POSSIBLE VISITORS, DESPITE PREDICTIONS TO THE CONTRARY. THE GOZ'S INTER-

VENTION INTO THE EQUALLY MISMANAGED AND EXORBITANTLY PRICED TOURIST PACKAGE DEALS FROM THE U.S. WAS A CASE OF BEING TOO LATE WITH TOO LITTLE. THEN, TOO, PUBLICITY FROM THE WELL-BILLED BUT FINANCIALLY UNSUCCESSFUL "ZAIRE 74" SOUL/ROCK FESTIVAL IN SEPTEMBER UNDOUBTEDLY DID LITTLE TO CONVINCE WOULD-BE TOURISTS THAT THE TRIP WAS WORTH THE TIME AND MONEY.

8. ALL THIS HAVING BEEN SAID, HOWEVER, THE FIGHT DID COME OFF. TELEPHONE LINES TO THE U.S. AND THE U.K. WERE INDEED WORKING, THE SATELLITE HOOKUP WORKED WELL AND IT DIDN'T RAIN UNTIL THE FIGHT WAS OVER AND THE STADIUM EMPTY. NOW, IF THE CHARTERED FLIGHTS ARE ON SCHEDULE FOR THE DEPARTURE OF THE FOREIGN PRESS CORPS, ZAIRE'S DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL ORIENTATION CAN RETURN TO DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY WITHOUT THE DISTURBING PRESENCE OF DEMANDING JOURNALISTS WHO PUSH AND SHOVE, REFUSE TO TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER AND LOOK AT LIFE THROUGH A JAUNDICED EYE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ATHLETIC PRESENTATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: boyleja
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974KINSHA09085
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740310-0249
From: KINSHASA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974107/aaaaaftj.tel
Line Count: 137
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: boyleja
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 MAY 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 MAY 2002 by martinml>; APPROVED <11 MAR 2003 by boyleja>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FOREMAN-ALI: THE FINAL ROUND?
TAGS: SCUL, CG, (FOREMAN, GEORGE), (ALI, MOHAMED)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005